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Anti-Terrorism Advice Mimics TV Fare

Have people at the Los Alamos National Laboratory been watching too many Saturday morning children's television shows?

Some of the anti-terrorist devices they've recommended to the Federal Emergency Management Agency sound as if they were stolen from an old Buck Rogers serial—or even Wile E. Coyote's fiendishly clever traps for the Roadrunner. Here are some of the far-out proposals:

- "A potential assassin entering the White House for a tour or reception, or standing in a crowd waiting for a presidential appearance, or a terrorist going through airport security or passport control, is likely to be under stress," the laboratory experts point out in a report to FEMA.

"The manifold symptoms of such stress may make such persons recognizable through the use of remote or other surreptitious equipment, the existence of which will not be apparent to them."

The concept seems to be a psychological "metal detector" that can scan everyone within its range and identify those under stress. It is not clear how the machine would differentiate between a potential terrorist and, say, someone who's just had a domestic spat or is worried about being parked in a tow-away zone on Pennsylvania Avenue.

- "Human Performance Enhancement in a Counter-Terrorist Context" is a benign weapon that would appeal to He-Man and other cartoon heroes. Secret injection of chemicals into food, water or air delivered to the bad guys would put them to sleep instantly.

"For example," the Los Alamos study explains, "hostages and guards could be overwhelmed by sleep in a hostage-barricade situation by some substance in the air they breathed, the food they ate or the water they drank. The hazards inherent in this situation could be quickly overcome without risk of injury or death. We do not, at present, know how to do this, but it is an exciting avenue to explore."

The study, reviewed by my associates Donald Goldberg and Indy Badhwar, notes that development of such a weapon would be useful to "many other sectors of the military and civilian communities as well."

There's irony in the respectability scientists seem prepared to give this idea, which sounds like the empty threats of radicals 15 or more years ago to pour LSD into municipal reservoirs.

The study does not address the possibility that while the CIA, for example, may be putting Cuba asleep for a bloodless takeover, Fidel Castro may be doing the same to Manhattan or Miami.

- Zapping terrorists with microwave radiation could kill them, stun them or at least modify their behavior by changing their "perceptions," the study contends. And it suggests that the Kremlin is hard at work on this diabolical ray gun: "There are reports of Eurasian communist countries performing research with combined fields of signals from several different microwave frequencies to produce at least perceptual distortions in humans."

For the time being, Los Alamos recommends that FEMA limit its psychological microwave cooking to experimenting with mice.